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## **Montgomery police union leader says pay increases are good start** [by Kate S. Alexander](#) *Staff writer*

Members of Montgomery County's police union likely will see their pay increase this July, but among the county's three unions, police will see the smallest raises.

Torrie Cooke, president of Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 35, said the county and the union agreed to a 2.1 percent general wage adjustment, or cost-of-living increase, and 1.75 percent increment increase, or step increase. Cooke said the 1.75 percent increment increases are half-steps.

All FOP members under the contract will receive the 2.1 percent wage adjustment on July 1. But only about two-thirds of the union's members will receive the 1.75 percent increment increase.

The county's agreement with its general employees union, United Food and Commercial Workers/Municipal and County Government Employees Organization Local 1994, calls for paying eligible workers a 3.5 percent step increase, a 3 percent longevity increase and a 3.25 percent cost-of-living adjustment increase each of the next two years.

The International Association of Fire Fighters local 1664 did not return requests for comment on its contract.

For police, the raises were negotiated because the current police contract with the county could be reopened this year to talk about compensation.

And while it is a start, it doesn't make up for the losses in pay police suffered during years of pay freezes, Cooke said.

"Our officers are on the front lines every day sacrificing for citizens of Montgomery County," he said. "By looking at that pay scale, our officers were promised to make certain achievements while giving their all for this county, and they haven't reached those achievements. This is a start."

In a March 11 press release, the union said its youngest officers have lost as much as \$40,000 in pay over the past four years because of pay freezes.

Pay freezes put many Montgomery County police officers behind their peers in other area police departments, Cooke said.

Starting pay for police in Montgomery County was already behind other jurisdictions, he said.

But the county's actions directly affected recruitment, as prospective officers would favor a department with a good salary and pay increases over Montgomery, with its years of frozen pay, Cooke said.

While the modest pay increase is much less than other county unions negotiated for next year, Cooke said, it is an affordable and progressive increase.

However, the pay increases for police — along with the larger pay raises negotiated by MCGEO and IAFF — could be in jeopardy already.

Councilman Philip M. Andrews has recommended the County Council reduce County Executive Isiah Leggett's proposed energy tax rate by another 10 percent.

To balance the lost revenue, Andrews has proposed decreasing the negotiated pay increases for county employees by 35 percent.

Leggett's recommended package of pay increases for county employees will cost the county \$31.6 million, adding \$15 million to his fiscal year 2014 budget.

Andrews said his proposal would reduce those increases across the board by about 35 percent, or \$11.4 million in total expenditures.

Andrews has been critical of the pay increases.

He called MCGEO's increases "excessive, unsustainable and irresponsible." He also said IAFF members would, because of a second, backfilled step increase, see a 19.5 percent increase in two years.

kalexander@gazette.net